

ELCA apologizes for persecution of Anabaptists: Lay foundation for international cooperation

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The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has formally apologized for Lutheran persecution of Anabaptists in 16th-century Europe.

A statement approved by the ELCA Church Council, the denomination's board of directors, during a mid-November meeting in Chicago declares that the church is expressing "its deep and abiding sorrow and regret for the persecution and suffering visited upon the Anabaptists during the religious disputes of the past."

Anabaptists trace their roots back to radical 16th-century European religious reformers and dissenters who stressed the need to baptize Christian believers, even those who had been baptized as infants. Their descendants are now found in such groups as the Amish, Hutterites and Mennonites.

The Lutheran declaration formally rejected arguments made by church reformers at the time such as Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon, both of whom said it was proper for authorities to punish Anabaptists for teachings at odds with Lutheran doctrine. A central Lutheran statement of faith, the Augsburg Confession, for example, is clear in condemning Anabaptists for the practice of adult baptism.

The U.S. Lutherans' statement "repudiates the use of governmental authorities to punish individuals or groups with whom it disagrees theologically."

Issued November 16, the statement further acknowledges that "the situation of the 16th century no longer applies in the 21st century," said Randall R. Lee, the Lutheran ecumenical affairs officer. "The condemnations that are contained in the Lutheran confessions may have been very important at that time, but have receded in their importance for this time and in the future." He added that the declaration will provide a foundation for international cooperation between the Lutheran World Federation and the global Mennonite community. *-Ecumenical News International*